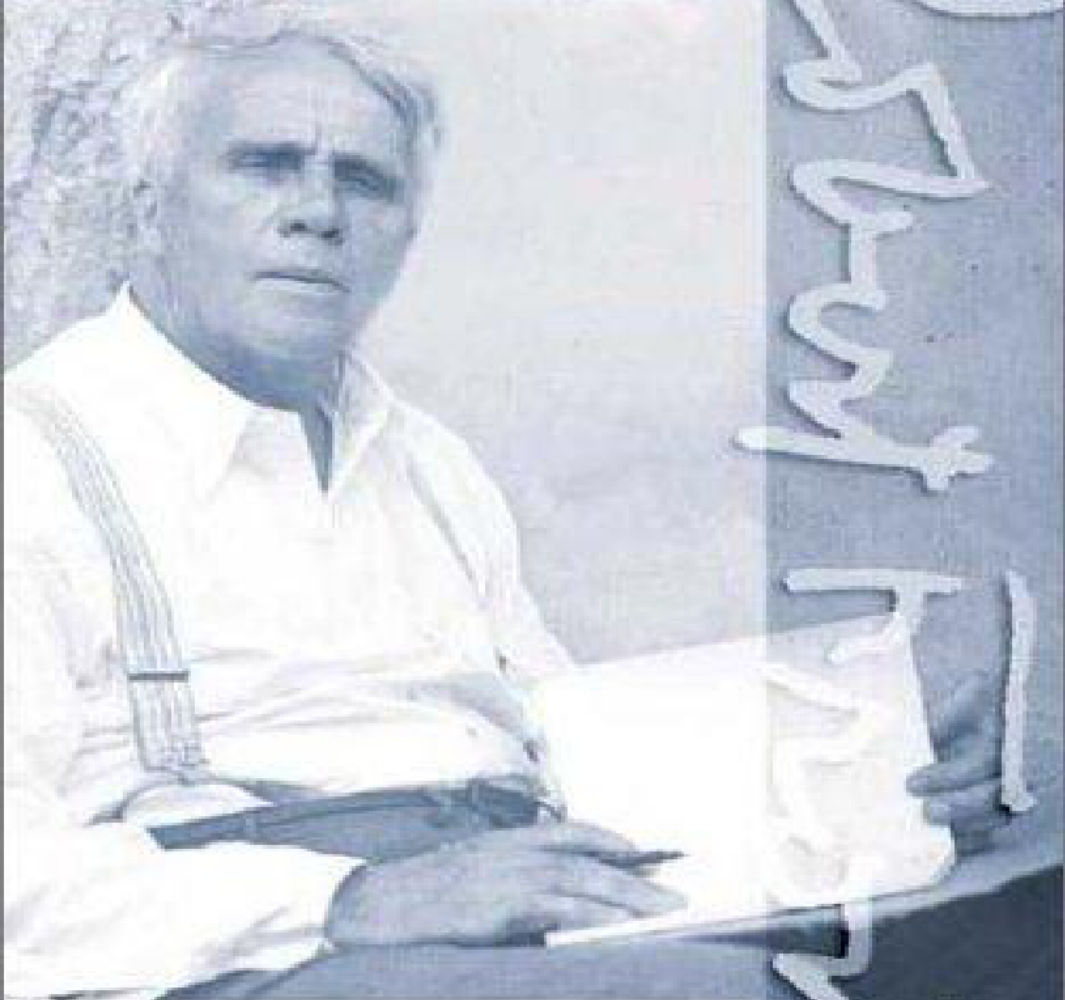


THE SELECTED POEMS OF
ROBERT FROST



WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
EDWARD C. LATHEM



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About the author

Robert Lee Frost (March
26, 1874—January 29, 1963)
was, in the estimation of many
Americans, the greatest
American poet of the 20th



century, and one of the
greatest poets writing in
English of the 20th century.
Frost received 4 Pulitzer
Prizes.

Frost, although most associated with New England, was born in San Francisco and lived in California until he was 11. Frost grew up as a city boy and published his first poem in Lawrence, Massachusetts. He attended Dartmouth College and Harvard University but did not complete a degree. Eventually, after purchasing a farm in Derry, New Hampshire, he became known for his wry voice that was both rural and personal.

In 1912 he sold his farm and moved to England to become a full-time poet. His first book of poetry, *A Boy's Will*, was published the next year. He returned to America in 1915, bought a farm in Franconia, New Hampshire and launched a career of writing, teaching and lecturing.

He recited his work, "The Gift Outright", at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and represented the United States on several official missions.

He also became known for poems that include an interplay of voices, such as "Death of the Hired Man". American schoolchildren often memorize his poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening". Other highly acclaimed poems include "Mending Wall", "Birches", "After Apple Picking", "The Pasture", "Fire and Ice", "The Road Not Taken", and "Directive".

On his passing in 1963, Robert Frost was buried in the Old Bennington Cemetery, in Bennington, Vermont.

During his life, the Robert Frost Middle School in Rockville, Maryland was named after him.

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The Poetry of Robert Frost.

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Out, Out.

The buzz-saw snarled and rattled in the yard
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood, Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it. And from there those that lifted eyes could count Five mountain ranges one behind the other

Under the sunset far into Vermont.

And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled, As it ran light, or had to bear a load.

And nothing happened: day was all but done. Call it a day, I wish they

might have said
To please the boy by giving him the half hour That a boy counts so
much when saved from work. His sister stood beside them in her
apron
To tell them "Supper." At the word, the saw,
As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,
Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap— He must have given
the hand. However it was, Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!
The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh,
As he swung toward them holding up the hand Half in appeal, but half
as if to keep
The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all—
<http://collegebookshelf.net>³
Since he was old enough to know, big boy
Doing a man's work, though a child at heart— He saw all spoiled.
"Don't let him cut my hand off— The doctor, when he comes. Don't
let him, sister!" So. But the hand was gone already.
The doctor put him in the dark of ether.
He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath. And then—the watcher
at his pulse took fright. No one believed. They listened at his heart.
Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it. No more to build on there.
And they, since they Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

A Girl's Garden

A neighbor of mine in the village
Likes to tell how one spring
When she was a girl on the farm, she did A childlike thing.
One day she asked her father
To give her a garden plot
To plant and tend and reap herself, And he said, "Why not?"
In casting about for a corner
He thought of an idle bit
Of walled-off ground where a shop had stood, And he said, "Just it."
And he said, "That ought to make you An ideal one-girl farm,
And give you a chance to put some strength On your slim-jim arm."
It was not enough of a garden Her father said, to plow;
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So she had to work it all by hand, But she don't mind now.
A great deal of none.
She wheeled the dung in a wheelbarrow Along a stretch of road;
But she always ran away and left Her not-nice load,
Now when she sees in the village How village things go,
Just when it seems to come in right, She says, "I know!"

And hid from anyone passing. And then she begged the seed. She says
she thinks she planted one Of all things but weed.
“It’s as when I was a farmer...” Oh never by way of advice!
And she never sins by telling the tale To the same person twice.
A hill each of potatoes,
Radishes, lettuce, peas,
Tomatoes, beets, beans, pumpkins, corn, And even fruit trees.
And yes, she has long mistrusted That a cider-apple
In bearing there today is hers, Or at least may be.
Her crop was a miscellany When all was said and done, A little bit of
everything,

After Apple-Picking

My long two-pointed ladder’s sticking through a tree Toward heaven
still,
And there’s a barrel that I didn’t fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn’t pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight I got from looking through
a pane of glass I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough And
held against the world of hoary grass. It melted, and I let it fall and
break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take. Magnified apples appear
and disappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
<http://collegebookshelf.net>⁷
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch, Cherish in hand, lift

down, and not let fall. For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble, Went surely to the
cider-apple heap
As of no worth.
One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his Long sleep, as I
describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

Birches

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them. But swinging doesn't
bend them down to stay. Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen
them Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells Shattering and
avalanching on the snow-crust— Such heaps of broken glass to sweep
away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen. They are dragged to
the withered bracken by the load, And they seem not to break; though
once they are bowed So low for long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods Years afterwards,
trailing their leaves on the ground Like girls on hands and knees that
throw their hair Before them over their heads to dry in the sun. But I
was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm (Now am I free to be
poetical?)

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I should prefer to have some boy bend them As he went out and in to
fetch the cows— Some boy too far from town to learn baseball, Whose
only play was what he found himself, Summer or winter, and could
play alone.

One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left For him to conquer. He
learned all there was To learn about not launching out too soon

And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise To the top branches,
climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish, Kicking his way down
through the air to the ground. So was I once myself a swinger of
birches.

And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs Broken across it,
and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open.
I'd like to get away from earth awhile

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And then come back to it and begin over. May no fate willfully
misunderstand me And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love: I don't know where it's
likely to go better. I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk Toward heaven, till
the tree could bear no more, But dipped its top and set me down
again. That would be good both going and coming back. One could do
worse than be a swinger of birches.

Dust of Snow

The way a crow
Shook down on me The dust of snow From a hemlock tree
Has given my heart A change of mood And saved some part Of a day I
had rued.

<http://collegebookshelf.net>¹³

Fire and Ice

Some say the world will end in fire, Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire I hold with those who favor fire. But if
it had to perish twice, I think I know enough of hate To know that for
destruction ice Is also great
And would suffice.

For Once, Then Something

Others taught me with having knelt at well-curbs Always wrong to the

light, so never seeing
Deeper down in the well than where the water Gives me back in a
shining surface picture
Me myself in the summer heaven godlike
Looking out of a wreath of fern and cloud puffs. Once, when trying
with chin against a well-curb, I discerned, as I thought, beyond the
picture, Through the picture, a something white, uncertain, Something
more of the depths—and then I lost it. Water came to rebuke the too
clear water.
One drop fell from a fern, and lo, a ripple
Shook whatever it was lay there at bottom,
Blurred it, blotted it out. What was that whiteness? Truth? A pebble of
quartz? For once, then, something.

Good-bye, and Keep Cold

This saying good-bye on the edge of the dark And cold to an orchard
so young in the bark Reminds me of all that can happen to harm An
orchard away at the end of the farm

All winter, cut off by a hill from the house. I don't want it girdled by
rabbit and mouse, I don't want it dreamily nibbled for browse By deer,
and I don't want it budded by grouse. (If certain it wouldn't be idle to
call

I'd summon grouse, rabbit, and deer to the wall And warn them away
with a stick for a gun.) I don't want it stirred by the heat of the sun.
(We made it secure against being, I hope, By setting it out on a
northerly slope.)

No orchard's the worse for the wintriest storm; But one thing about it,
it mustn't get warm. "How often already you've had to be told, Keep
cold, young orchard. Good-bye and keep cold. Dread fifty above more
than fifty below."

I have to be gone for a season or so.

My business awhile is with different trees, Less carefully nourished,
less fruitful than these,

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And such as is done to their wood with an axe— Maples and birches
and tamaracks.

I wish I could promise to lie in the night And think of an orchard's
arboreal plight When slowly (and nobody comes with a light) Its heart
sinks lower under the sod.

But something has to be left to God.

Mending Wall

Something there is that doesn't love a wall, That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it, And spills the upper boulders in the sun; And makes gaps even two can pass abreast. The work of hunters is another thing:

I have come after them and made repair Where they have left not one stone on a stone, But they would have the rabbit out of hiding, To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean, No one has seen them made or heard them made, But at spring mending-time we find them there. I let my neighbour know beyond the hill; And on a day we meet to walk the line

And set the wall between us once again. We keep the wall between us as we go.

To each the boulders that have fallen to each. And some are loaves and some so nearly balls We have to use a spell to make them balance: "Stay where you are until our backs are turned!" We wear our fingers rough with handling them. Oh, just another kind of out-door game, One on a side. It comes to little more:

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There where it is we do not need the wall:

He is all pine and I am apple orchard.

My apple trees will never get across

And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him. He only says, "Good fences make good neighbours." Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder If I could put a notion in his head:

"Why do they make good neighbours? Isn't it Where there are cows?

But here there are no cows. Before I built a wall I'd ask to know

What I was walling in or walling out,

And to whom I was like to give offence.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall, That wants it down." I

could say "Elves" to him, But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather

He said it for himself. I see him there

Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed. He moves in darkness as it seems to me,

Not of woods only and the shade of trees.

He will not go behind his father's saying,

And he likes having thought of it so well

He says again, "Good fences make good neighbours."

<http://collegebookshelf.net>¹⁹

Neither Out Far Nor In Deep

The people along the sand

All turn and look one way.

They turn their back on the land.

They look at the sea all day.

As long as it takes to pass A ship keeps raising its hull; The wetter ground like glass Reflects a standing gull.

Nothing Gold Can Stay

Nature's first green is gold

Her hardest hue to hold.

Her early leaf 's a flower;

But only so an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf.

So Eden sank to grief,

So dawn goes down to day.

Nothing gold can stay.

The land may vary more;

But wherever the truth may be— The water comes ashore,

And the people look at the sea.

They cannot look out far. They cannot look in deep. But when was that ever a bar To any watch they keep?

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Once By The Pacific

The shattered water made a misty din. Great waves looked over others coming in, And thought of doing something to the shore That water never did to land before.

The clouds were low and hairy in the skies, Like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes. You could not tell, and yet it looked as if The shore was lucky in being backed by cliff, The cliff in being backed by continent; It looked as if a night of dark intent

Was coming, and not only a night, an age. Someone had better be prepared for rage. There would be more than ocean-water broken Before God's last Put out the Light was spoken.

Putting in the Seed

You come to fetch me from my work to-night When supper's on the table, and we'll see

If I can leave off burying the white

Soft petals fallen from the apple tree.

(Soft petals, yes, but not so barren quite,

Mingled with these, smooth bean and wrinkled pea;) And go along with you ere you lose sight

Of what you came for and become like me, Slave to a springtime

passion for the earth. How Love burns through the Putting in the Seed
On through the watching for that early birth When, just as the soil
tarnishes with weed,
The sturdy seedling with arched body comes Shouldering its way and
shedding the earth crumbs. <http://collegebookshelf.net>²³

Range-Finding

The battle rent a cobweb diamond-strung And cut a flower beside a
ground bird's nest Before it stained a single human breast. The
stricken flower bent double and so hung. And still the bird revisited
her young.

A butterfly its fall had dispossessed

A moment sought in air his flower of rest, Then lightly stooped to it
and fluttering clung.

On the bare upland pasture there had spread O'ernight 'twixt mullein
stalks a wheel of thread And straining cables wet with silver dew. A
sudden passing bullet shook it dry.

The indwelling spider ran to greet the fly, But finding nothing,
sullenly withdrew.

Spring Pools

These pools that, though in forests, still reflect The total sky almost
without defect,

And like the flowers beside them, chill and shiver, Will like the
flowers beside them soon be gone, And yet not out by any brook or
river,

But up by roots to bring dark foliage on. The trees that have it in their
pent-up buds To darken nature and be summer woods— Let them
think twice before they use their powers To blot out and drink up and
sweep away These flowery waters and these watery flowers From
snow that melted only yesterday.

— <http://collegebookshelf.net>²⁵

Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know. His house is in the village
though; He will not see me stopping here To watch his woods fill up
with snow.

My little horse must think it queer To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake The darkest evening of the year.

The Death of the Hired Man

Mary sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table Waiting for Warren.
When she heard his step, She ran on tip-toe down the darkened
passage To meet him in the doorway with the news And put him on
his guard. "Silas is back." She pushed him outward with her through
the door And shut it after her. "Be kind," she said.

She took the market things from Warren's arms And set them on the
porch, then drew him down To sit beside her on the wooden steps.

He gives his harness bells a shake To ask if there is some mistake. The
only other sound's the sweep Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep. "When
was I ever anything but kind to him? But I'll not have the fellow
back," he said. "I told him so last haying, didn't I?

'If he left then,' I said, 'that ended it.' What good is he? Who else will
harbour him At his age for the little he can do?

What help he is there's no depending on. Off he goes always when I
need him most. 'He thinks he ought to earn a little pay, Enough at
least to buy tobacco with, So he won't have to beg and be beholden.'
'All right,' I say, 'I can't afford to pay

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Any fixed wages, though I wish I could.'

'Someone else can.' 'Then someone else will have to.' I shouldn't mind
his bettering himself

If that was what it was. You can be certain, When he begins like that,
there's someone at him Trying to coax him off with pocket-money,—
In haying time, when any help is scarce.

In winter he comes back to us. I'm done."

Nothing would do: he just kept nodding off."

"What did he say? Did he say anything?"

"But little."

"Anything? Mary, confess

He said he'd come to ditch the meadow for me."

"Sh! not so loud: he'll hear you," Mary said. "Warren!"

"I want him to: he'll have to soon or late." "But did he? I just want to
know."

"He's worn out. He's asleep beside the stove. When I came up from
Rowe's I found him here, Huddled against the barn-door fast asleep, A
miserable sight, and frightening, too— You needn't smile—I didn't
recognise him— I wasn't looking for him—and he's changed. Wait till
you see."

"Where did you say he'd been?"

"He didn't say. I dragged him to the house, And gave him tea and

tried to make him smoke. I tried to make him talk about his travels.
“Of course he did. What would you have him say? Surely you
wouldn’t grudge the poor old man Some humble way to save his self-
respect. He added, if you really care to know,

He meant to clear the upper pasture, too. That sounds like something
you have heard before? Warren, I wish you could have heard the way
He jumbled everything. I stopped to look Two or three times—he
made me feel so queer— To see if he was talking in his sleep.

He ran on Harold Wilson—you remember— The boy you had in
haying four years since. He’s finished school, and teaching in his
college.

<http://collegebookshelf.net>²⁹

Silas declares you’ll have to get him back. He says they two will make
a team for work: Between them they will lay this farm as smooth! The
way he mixed that in with other things. He thinks young Wilson a
likely lad, though daft On education—you know how they fought All
through July under the blazing sun, Silas up on the cart to build the
load,

Harold along beside to pitch it on.”

“Yes, I took care to keep well out of earshot.” He wanted to go over
that. But most of all He thinks if he could have another chance To
teach him how to build a load of hay——”

“I know, that’s Silas’ one accomplishment. He bundles every forkful in
its place,

And tags and numbers it for future reference, So he can find and easily
dislodge it

In the unloading. Silas does that well. He takes it out in bunches like
big birds’ nests. You never see him standing on the hay He’s trying to
lift, straining to lift himself.”

“Well, those days trouble Silas like a dream.

You wouldn’t think they would. How some things linger! Harold’s
young college boy’s assurance piqued him. After so many years he still
keeps finding

Good arguments he sees he might have used.

I sympathise. I know just how it feels

To think of the right thing to say too late.

Harold’s associated in his mind with Latin.

He asked me what I thought of Harold’s saying He studied Latin like
the violin

Because he liked it—that an argument!

He said he couldn’t make the boy believe

He could find water with a hazel prong—

Which showed how much good school had ever done him. “He thinks
if he could teach him that, he’d be Some good perhaps to someone in

the world. He hates to see a boy the fool of books. Poor Silas, so concerned for other folk, And nothing to look backward to with pride, And nothing to look forward to with hope, So now and never any different."

Part of a moon was falling down the west, Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills. Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand Among the harp-like morning-glory strings,

<http://collegebookshelf.net> 31

Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves, As if she played unheard the tenderness That wrought on him beside her in the night. "Warren," she said, "he has come home to die: You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time." Silas has walked that far no doubt to-day. Why didn't he go there? His brother's rich, A somebody—director in the bank."

"He never told us that."

"Home," he mocked gently. "We know it though."

"Yes, what else but home?"

It all depends on what you mean by home. Of course he's nothing to us, any more Than was the hound that came a stranger to us Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail."

"Home is the place where, when you have to go there, They have to take you in."

"I think his brother ought to help, of course. I'll see to that if there is need. He ought of right To take him in, and might be willing to— He may be better than appearances.

But have some pity on Silas. Do you think If he'd had any pride in claiming kin

Or anything he looked for from his brother, He'd keep so still about him all this time?"

"I should have called it

Something you somehow haven't to deserve." "I wonder what's between them."

Warren leaned out and took a step or two, Picked up a little stick, and brought it back And broke it in his hand and tossed it by. "Silas has better claim on us you think Than on his brother? Thirteen little miles As the road winds would bring him to his door. "I can tell you.

Silas is what he is—we wouldn't mind him— But just the kind that kinsfolk can't abide. He never did a thing so very bad.

He don't know why he isn't quite as good As anyone. He won't be made ashamed To please his brother, worthless though he is."

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Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited. "I can't think Si ever hurt anyone."

“Warren,” she questioned. “No, but he hurt my heart the way he lay
And rolled his old head on that sharp-edged chair-back. He wouldn’t
let me put him on the lounge.

You must go in and see what you can do.

I made the bed up for him there to-night.

You’ll be surprised at him—how much he’s broken. His working days
are done; I’m sure of it.”

“I’d not be in a hurry to say that.”

“I haven’t been. Go, look, see for yourself. But, Warren, please
remember how it is: He’s come to help you ditch the meadow. He has
a plan. You mustn’t laugh at him. He may not speak of it, and then he
may. I’ll sit and see if that small sailing cloud Will hit or miss the
moon.”

It hit the moon.

Then there were three there, making a dim row, The moon, the little
silver cloud, and she.

Warren returned—too soon, it seemed to her, “Dead,” was all he
answered. <http://collegebookshelf.net>³⁵

The Oven Bird

There is a singer everyone has heard,

Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird, Who makes the solid tree
trunks sound again. He says that leaves are old and that for flowers
Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.

He says the early petal-fall is past

When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers On sunny days a
moment overcast;

And comes that other fall we name the fall. He says the highway dust
is over all.

The bird would cease and be as other birds But that he knows in
singing not to sing.

The question that he frames in all but words Is what to make of a
diminished thing.

The Pasture

I’m going out to clean the pasture spring; I’ll only stop to rake the
leaves away (And wait to watch the water clear, I may): I sha’n’t be
gone long.—You come too.

I’m going out to fetch the little calf

That’s standing by the mother. It’s so young, It totters when she licks
it with her tongue. I sha’n’t be gone long.—You come too.

<http://collegebookshelf.net>³⁷

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel
both And be one traveler, long I stood And looked down one as far as I
could To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other, as just as fair, And having perhaps the better
claim, Because it was grassy and wanted wear; Though as for that the
passing there Had worn them really about the same,

The Rose Family

The rose is a rose,
And was always a rose. But now the theory goes That the apple's a
rose, And the pear is, and so's The plum, I suppose.
The dear only knows
What will next prove a rose. You, of course, are a rose— But were
always a rose.
And both that morning equally lay In leaves no step had trodden
black. Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads
on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two
roads diverged in a wood, and I— I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference. —

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The Sound Of The Trees

I WONDER about the trees. Why do we wish to bear
Forever the noise of these
More than another noise
So close to our dwelling place? We suffer them by the day
Till we lose all measure of pace, And fixity in our joys,
And acquire a listening air.
They are that that talks of going But never gets away;
And that talks no less for knowing, As it grows wiser and older,
That now it means to stay.
My feet tug at the floor
And my head sways to my shoulder Sometimes when I watch trees
sway, From the window or the door. I shall set forth for somewhere, I
shall make the reckless choice Some day when they are in voice And
tossing so as to scare
The white clouds over them on. I shall have less to say, But I shall be
gone.

The Star-Splitter

You know Orien always comes up sideways. Throwing a leg up over our fence of mountains, And rising on his hands, he looks in on me Busy outdoors by lantern-light with something I should have done by daylight, and indeed, After the ground is frozen, I should have done Before it froze, and a gust flings a handful Of waste leaves at my smoky lantern chimney To make fun of my way of doing things, Or else fun of Orion's having caught me. Has a man, I should like to ask, no rights These forces are obliged to pay respect to?" So Brad McLaughlin mingled reckless talk Of heavenly stars with hugger-mugger farming, Till having failed at hugger-mugger farming, He burned his house down for the fire insurance And spent the proceeds on a telescope

To satisfy a life-long curiosity

About our place among the infinities.

"What do you want with one of those blame things?" I asked him well beforehand. "Don't you get one!" "Don't call it blamed; there isn't anything

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More blameless in the sense of being less

A weapon in our human fight," he said.

"I'll have one if I sell my farm to buy it."

There where he moved the rocks to plow the ground And plowed between the rocks he couldn't move, Few farms changed hands; so rather than spend years Trying to sell his farm and then not selling, He burned his house down for the fire insurance And bought the telescope with what it came to. He had been heard to say by several:

"The best thing that we're put here for's to see; The strongest thing that's given us to see with's A telescope. Someone in every town

Seems to me owes it to the town to keep one. In Littleton it may as well be me."

After such loose talk it was no surprise

When he did what he did and burned his house down. Mean laughter went about the town that day To let him know we weren't the least imposed on, And he could wait—we'd see to him to-morrow. But the first thing next morning we reflected If one by one we counted people out

For the least sin, it wouldn't take us long

To get so we had no one left to live with.

For to be social is to be forgiving.

Our thief, the one who does our stealing from us,

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We don't cut off from coming to church suppers, But what we miss we

go to him and ask for. He promptly gives it back, that is if still Uneaten, unworn out, or undisposed of. It wouldn't do to be too hard on Brad

About his telescope. Beyond the age

Of being given one's gift for Christmas, He had to take the best way he knew how To find himself in one. Well, all we said was He took a strange thing to be roguish over. Some sympathy was wasted on the house, A good old-timer dating back along;

But a house isn't sentient; the house

Didn't feel anything. And if it did,

Why not regard it as a sacrifice,

And an old-fashioned sacrifice by fire,

Instead of a new-fashioned one at auction?

Out of a house and so out of a farm

At one stroke (of a match), Brad had to turn To earn a living on the Concord railroad, As under-ticket-agent at a station

Where his job, when he wasn't selling tickets, Was setting out up track and down, not plants As on a farm, but planets, evening stars That varied in their hue from red to green. He got a good glass for six hundred dollars. His new job gave him leisure for star-gazing. Often he bid me come and have a look Up the brass barrel, velvet black inside, At a star quaking in the other end.

I recollect a night of broken clouds

And underfoot snow melted down to ice, And melting further in the wind to mud. Bradford and I had out the telescope. We spread our two legs as it spread its three, Pointed our thoughts the way we pointed it, And standing at our leisure till the day broke, Said some of the best things we ever said. That telescope was christened the Star-splitter, Because it didn't do a thing but split

A star in two or three the way you split A globule of quicksilver in your hand With one stroke of your finger in the middle. It's a star-splitter if there ever was one And ought to do some good if splitting stars 'Sa thing to be compared with splitting wood.

We've looked and looked, but after all where are we? Do we know any better where we are,

And how it stands between the night to-night

<http://collegebookshelf.net>⁴⁵ And a man with a smoky lantern chimney?

How different from the way it ever stood?*The Tuft of Flowers*

I went to turn the grass once after one Who mowed it in the dew before the sun.

The dew was gone that made his blade so keen Before I came to view the levelled scene.

I looked for him behind an isle of trees; I listened for his whetstone on the breeze.

But he had gone his way, the grass all mown, And I must be, as he had been,—alone,

‘As all must be,’ I said within my heart, ‘Whether they work together or apart.’

But as I said it, swift there passed me by On noiseless wing a ‘wildered butterfly,

Seeking with memories grown dim o’er night Some resting flower of yesterday’s delight.

And once I marked his flight go round and round, As where some flower lay withering on the ground.

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And hear his long scythe whispering to the ground, And then he flew as far as eye could see,

And then on tremulous wing came back to me. And feel a spirit kindred to my own;

So that henceforth I worked no more alone; I thought of questions that have no reply,

And would have turned to toss the grass to dry; But glad with him, I worked as with his aid,

And weary, sought at noon with him the shade; But he turned first, and led my eye to look

At a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook, And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech

With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach. A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared

Beside a reedy brook the scythe had bared. ‘Men work together,’ I told him from the heart,

‘Whether they work together or apart.’ I left my place to know them by their name, Finding them butterfly weed when I came.

The mower in the dew had loved them thus, By leaving them to flourish, not for us,

Nor yet to draw one thought of ours to him. But from sheer morning gladness at the brim.

The butterfly and I had lit upon, Nevertheless, a message from the dawn,

That made me hear the wakening birds around, <http://collegebookshelf.net>⁴⁹

The Wood-Pile

Out walking in the frozen swamp one grey day I paused and said, "I
will turn back from here. No, I will go on farther—and we shall see."
The hard snow held me, save where now and then One foot went
down. The view was all in Straight up and
down of tall slim trees
Too much alike to mark or name a place by
So as to say for certain I was here
Or somewhere else: I was just far from home. A small bird flew before
me. He was careful
To put a tree between us when he lighted,
And say no word to tell me who he was
Who was so foolish as to think what he thought. He thought that I was
after him for a feather— The white one in his tail; like one who takes
Everything said as personal to himself.
One flight out sideways would have undeceived him. And then there
was a pile of wood for which
I forgot him and let his little fear
Carry him off the way I might have gone,
Without so much as wishing him good-night. He went behind it to
make his last stand.
It was a cord of maple, cut and split
And piled—and measured, four by four by eight. And not another like
it could I see.
No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it. And it was older
sure than this year's cutting, Or even last year's or the year's before.
The wood was grey and the bark warping off it And the pile somewhat
sunken. Clematis
Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle. What held it
though on one side was a tree Still growing, and on one a stake and
prop, These latter about to fall. I thought that only Someone who
lived in turning to fresh tasks Could so forget his handiwork on which
He spent himself, the labour of his axe,
And leave it there far from a useful fireplace To warm the frozen
swamp as best it could With the slow smokeless burning of decay.

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To E. T.

I slumbered with your poems on my breast Spread open as I dropped
them half-read through Like dove wings on a figure on a tomb
To see, if in a dream they brought of you,
I might not have the chance I missed in life Through some delay, and
call you to your face First soldier, and then poet, and then both, Who
died a soldier-poet of your race.

I meant, you meant, that nothing should remain Unsaid between us,
brother, and this remained— And one thing more that was not then to
say: The Victory for what it lost and gained.

You went to meet the shell's embrace of fire On Vimy Ridge; and
when you fell that day The war seemed over more for you than me,
But now for me than you—the other way.

How over, though, for even me who knew

The foe thrust back unsafe beyond the Rhine, If I was not to speak of
it to you

And see you pleased once more with words of mine?

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